

DISTURBING EVENTS IN PUERTO RICAN POLITICS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BLACKBURN). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. Madam Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of this body some disturbing events in Puerto Rican politics during recent years. Specifically, I will talk about the corrupt and unethical actions of Puerto Rico's statehood leaders. I would like to start by saying that for many years Puerto Rico enjoyed an impeccable reputation of clean government. I am sad to say that this tradition was tainted by former Governor Pedro Rossello and his administration. During his administration, as Puerto Rico later discovered, there were many corruption schemes and rotten administrators pocketing millions of Federal and local funds. The irony is that the leadership of the Statehood Party, the party led by Governor Rossello for almost 10 years, became the leaders of the first corrupt government in the history of Puerto Rico. A party that claims to admire American democracy, a party that wants Puerto Rico to become a State of the union, was the party that embezzled Federal funds that belonged to our elders, our sick, and our children.

In 1997, the statehooders came to Washington to push for a statehood bill. They used millions of dollars in lobbying and political support to convince Congress that all Puerto Ricans wanted to become a State and used millions to silence the other voices from Puerto Rico. Now we know that this campaign was partially financed by illegal money.

It is amazing that, even today, the leaders of the Statehood Party are unwilling to recognize the depth of the corruption and continue to try to spin the issue as one of political persecution. They have gone as far as accusing the U.S. District Attorney's office in Puerto Rico of promoting prosecutions just for political reasons. They have no remorse.

As a result of the Federal and local investigations of this statehood corruption scheme, during the last months we have witnessed the conviction and indictment of many of the highest-ranking statehood leaders. In this chart, you will be able to see how far corruption went under the Statehood Party's government in the island. This is the Statehood Party's Hall of Shame. The list of corrupt officials and the depth of the corruption are impressive. Here are some of the cases.

In the legislative branch, Speaker Edison Misla-Aldarrondo, Speaker of the House, convicted.

Jose Granados-Navedo, Vice President of the House, resigned under scandal.

Norberto Nieves, legislator, convicted.

Jose Nunez, legislator, indicted.

Anibal Marrero, Vice President of the Senate, resigned under scandal.

Senator Victor Marrero, convicted.

Senator Freddie Valentin, convicted.

Let us see the executive branch: The personal assistant to the Governor, Angie Rivera, the person that had the key to the Governor's office, convicted.

Marcos Morell, secretary-general, executive director of the party, disbarred by the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico because of conflict of interest doing business with the government.

Bernardo Negron, president of the Federation of Statehood Party Mayors, convicted.

Andres Barbeito, director of the Pen-sions Administration, indicted.

Luis Dubon, the owner of the Statehood Party headquarters building, convicted.

Angel Luis Ocasio, deputy chief of staff to the Governor, convicted.

Eduardo Burgos, another deputy chief of staff to the Governor, convicted.

Jose Cobian, deputy finance director of the Statehood Party, indicted.

Victor Fajardo, Secretary of Education, convicted.

Oscar Ramos, administrator of the State Insurance Fund, under special prosecutor investigation.

Daniel Pagan, secretary of the Natural Resources Department, indicted.

Although Mr. Rossello has not been indicted, the extension of these corruption schemes leads to one of two possible explanations: number one, he was part of this scheme; or, number two, he is such an inept administrator that he should not be trusted again with the duty of managing a government or any institution.

When I first arrived as a freshman in Congress 2 years ago, I was informed that millions of dollars in Federal funds had been frozen or were at risk of being frozen because of this situation. The task of Governor Calderon and me was to assure compliance with Federal requirements to make the funds once again available. The projects and programs affected include child care, nutritional assistance, title I, Head Start, TANF, the urban train project, housing and E-rate.

After just 2 years, our efforts brought the desired results: the new administration in Puerto Rico implemented measures to comply with the Federal programs' requirements and the Federal Government of Puerto Rico was able to receive the frozen funds.

I want to clarify that the Statehood Party Hall of Shame has nothing to do with the national parties here. It is a cancer in the statehood movement. For example, Pedro Rossello was a well-known and active Democrat, and Edison Misla-Aldarrondo, the former Speaker of the House, was the Republican Party National Committee man. The common denominator is they belong to the leadership of the Statehood Party.

When the leaders of the Statehood Party come to Washington to lobby be-

hind the backs of the people of Puerto Rico, I urge you to ask them, where were they when their party leaders were using Federal funds for personal and political purposes?

REMARKS OF CONGRESSMAN ANIBAL ACEVEDO-VILÁ TO BE ENTERED INTO RECORD

Madam Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of this body some disturbing events in Puerto Rican politics during recent years. Specifically, I will talk about the corrupt and unethical actions of Puerto Rico's statehood leaders.

I would like to start by saying that for many years Puerto Rico enjoyed an impeccable reputation of clean government and true public service. Leaders such as Luis Muñoz Marín, Roberto Sánchez, Rafael Hernández Colón, and Luis Ferré, earned the trust and respect of the people for their honesty in the management of the public treasure.

I am sad to say that this tradition was tainted by former Governor Pedro Rosselló and his administration. In 1992 Mr. Rosselló took office with a platform of government reform and ambitious public projects. He governed until the year 2000. During his administration, as Puerto Rico later discovered, there were many corruption schemes and rotten administrators pocketing millions of federal and local funds.

The irony is that the leadership of the Statehood party—the party lead by Governor Rosselló for almost 10 years—became the leaders of the first corrupt government in the history of Puerto Rico. A party that claims to admire American democracy, a party that wants Puerto Rico to become a state of the Union was the party that embezzled federal funds that belonged to our elders, our sick and our children!

In 1997, the statehooders came to Washington to push for a statehood bill. They used millions of dollars in lobbying and in political support to convince Congress that all Puerto Ricans wanted to become a state and used millions to silence the other voices from Puerto Rico. For years many of you in Congress witnessed the costly and aggressive campaign that the Puerto Rico statehood leaders orchestrated to advocate for statehood. Now we know that this campaign was partially financed by illegal money. I wonder how much more of that money was dirty money!

Moreover, Mr. Rosselló disregarded for years pleas by the opposition, by the press, by the civil society in general to investigate his government and his party. Instead of looking into the allegations he decided to conceal the facts, to protect his friend and to defend the corrupt members of his administration. Fortunately the federal authorities did their job in investigating and prosecuting the criminals and the people of Puerto Rico judged the statehood party in the polls.

It is amazing that even today the leaders of the statehood party are unwilling to recognize the depth of the corruption, and continue to try to spin the issue as one of political persecution. They have gone as far as accusing the US District Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico of promoting prosecutions just for political reasons. They have openly said that the Federal Court system and local authorities are part of a conspiracy to criminalize statehood, again showing an utter disregard for the truth. They showed no remorse!

Do not get me wrong, the statehood movement is a legitimate movement and has many

decent and honest members. Unfortunately for them, their leaders have betrayed their cause. There is no conspiracy to criminalize statehood, in fact, most of the convicted officials pleaded guilty in court before their sentences. There is a duty to prosecute the criminals that have hidden behind the statehood banner to steal money and for their own corrupt purposes. It is this leadership that I indict today. This statehood leadership that has inflicted the most damage to the statehood cause in Puerto Rico and the United States.

As a result of the federal and local investigations of this statehood corruption scheme, during the last months we have witnessed the conviction and indictment of many of the highest-ranking statehood leaders, including the personal assistant to former Governor Rosselló, two of the former Governor's Deputy Chief of Staff, the former Speaker of the Puerto Rico House of Representatives and former National Committeeman of the Republican Party in the Island, and the former Secretary of Education that pleaded guilty, to stealing at least \$4.3 million of federal Title I funds for his benefit and the benefit of the Statehood Party.

In this chart you will be able to see how far corruption went under the statehood party's government in the Island. This is the Statehood's Party Hall of Shame. The list of corrupt officials and the depth of the corruption are impressive. Here are some of the cases that have been brought to Justice so far.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Mr. Edison Mislá-Aldarrondo (Speaker, PR House of Rep. And National Committeeman, Republican Party Puerto Rico Committee) Convicted

2. Mr. Aníbal Marrero (Vice President, Puerto Rico Senate) Resigned under scandal.

3. Mr. José Granados-Navedo (Vice President, Puerto Rico House of Reps.) Resigned under scandal.

4. Mr. Norberto Nieves (Member, PR House of Rep.) Convicted.

5. Mr. Freddie Valentín (Senator, PR Senate) Pleaded guilty.

6. Mr. Víctor Marrero (Senator, PR Senate) Convicted.

7. Mr. José Nuñez (Member, PR house of Reps.) Indicted.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

1. Ms. María de los Angeles "Angie" Rivera (Personal and closest assistant of Governor Rosselló) Convicted.

2. Mr. Víctor Fajardo (Secretary, Department of Education) Pleaded guilty.

3. Mr. Daniel Pagán (Secretary, Department of Natural Resources and Environment) Indicted.

4. Mr. Andrés Barbeito (Director, Government Pensions Administration) Convicted.

5. Mr. Eduardo Burgos (Former Deputy Chief of Staff; Director, Municipal Revenues Collection Center) Convicted.

6. Mr. Luis Dubón (Owner, Statehood Party Headquarters' Building) Convicted.

7. Mr. José Cobian (Deputy Finances Director, New Progressive Party) Convicted.

8. Mr. Angel Luis Ocasio-Ramos (Deputy Chief of Staff, Governor Rosselló's Office) Convicted.

9. Marcos Morell (Former Executive Director of the Statehood Party) Disbarred by the Puerto Rico Supreme Court for a conflict of interest doing business with the Rosselló administration.

10. Bernardo Negrón (President, Federation of Statehood Party Mayors) Convicted.

Although Mr. Rosselló has not been indicted, the extension of the corruption leads to one or two possible explanations: 1) he was part of the corruption scheme; or 2) he is such an inept administrator that he should not be trusted again with the duty of managing a government.

During the investigation in cases such as the Secretary of Education scandal, the federal prosecutors found evidence that at least \$1 million from federal funds were funneled into NPP (Statehood Party) coffers. It is widely known in Puerto Rico that the Secretary of Education was a leader in the Statehood Party's GOTV efforts during the political status plebiscite and the general elections.

The widespread corruption that I just described had a negative impact in many federal grants and programs that Puerto Rico was entitled to receive. When I first arrived as a freshman in Congress, I was informed that millions of dollars in federal funds had been frozen or at risk of being frozen because of this situation. The task of Governor Sila M. Calderón and myself was to assure compliance with federal requirements to make the funds once again available. The projects and programs affected include Child Care, the Nutritional Assistance Program, Head Start, TANF, the Urban Train Project, Housing and E Rate.

After just two years our efforts brought the desired results, the new Administration in Puerto Rico implemented the measures to comply with the federal programs' requirements and the Government of Puerto Rico was able to receive the frozen funds.

To do this is difficult to me as a Puerto Rican because the Puerto Ricans are a decent people, hard working people, an honest people. I know that this information may feed some unfair stereotypes. But Congress needs to be cognizant of the truth and I trust that the members of this House will be discerning and will not generalize based on a sad, but isolated case in our history. As a matter of fact, the way this Congress has treated Puerto Rico recently, authorizing the highest increase of federal funds for the Island in the Title I education program and appropriating funds for other important programs is a clear showing that Congress has recognized that Puerto Rico's government is back in good and clean hands. I am here to clear the name of Puerto Rico and to explain how we have extirpated the cancer of corruption.

What are we doing? We are cleaning up house and making sure it never happens again. As a result of the corruption scandals in former Governor Rosselló's administration, Sila M. Calderón ran for Governor of Puerto Rico with the goal of providing the Puerto Rican people with a transparent government. She has dedicated the past two years to implementing tough measures to restore public confidence in government.

I want to clarify that the statehood party hall of shame has nothing to do with the national parties. It is a cancer in the statehood movement. For example, Pedro Rosselló was a well-known and active Democrat; and Edison Mislá, former Speaker of the House was the Republican Party National Committee man in Puerto Rico. The common denominator is that they belong to the leadership of the statehood party.

Although the statehood leadership periodically comes to this capital to express their es-

teem for the U.S., they misunderstand the values that the American flag represents.

When the leaders of the statehood party come again to Washington to lobby behind the backs of the people of Puerto Rico I urge you to ask them where were they when their party leaders were using federal funds for personal and political purposes. Ask them why did they remain in silence? Why they did nothing to fight corruption? Why are they supporting Pedro Rosselló's comeback to Puerto Rican politics, the person responsible for this disaster?

HEALTH CARE CRISIS IN OUR NATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SOLIS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. SOLIS. Madam Speaker, tonight I am very pleased to be here to speak about health care and the crisis that we face here in our Nation and particularly about the crisis that is affecting the Hispanic population and other minority groups.

I am delighted that I have been joined tonight by three colleagues that will speak about some of the situations and problems that they face in their own States. First I would like to, as chairwoman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Health Task Force, recognize the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN), who is our representative for the Virgin Islands. She is chair of the Hispanic brain trust for the Black Caucus.

I yield to the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Madam Speaker, I want to begin by commending the leadership of the Hispanic Caucus, past and present, my colleague and current Chair, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ), and my health counterpart, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SOLIS), for the leadership they provide for all Americans and for the effective representation they provide to people of Hispanic descent. All people of color face unacceptable barriers to health care, but Hispanics and Latinos face the additional burden of language. Anti-immigrant sentiment places further roadblocks in their way to health services. Because of the leadership of the Hispanic Caucus in collaboration with advocacy groups, attention is being brought to these issues and the barriers are beginning to come down, but there is still much to be done.

Madam Speaker, the racial disparities in health care so ably documented by the Institutes of Medicine report and other reviews continue to show that if you are a minority American, you are likely to receive a diminished quality of care even if you have the same income and educational status. As we recognize the plight of the uninsured this week and the reverberating impact not just on families but on entire communities including those with